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ABSTRACT

The author summarizes the origin of his occupational classification scheme, the main events in its development, and its present form. A number of deficiencies in this classification scheme are addressed, and the virtues of the scheme are enumerated. Although the present classification is the outcome of much empirical work, individual categorizations are approximate rather than precise. (SJL)

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT STATUS OF AN OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION

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I will try to summarize, in 10 minutes, the origin of my occupational classification scheme, the main events in its development, and its present form. Dean Nafziger, will summarize some recent studies of the classification's usefulness. Then, Sam Helms will outline how counselors can use the classification. Last, Professor Meyers will tell us what he thinks about our data and our talks.

Origin and Main Events

The classification grew out of the first six Vocational Preference Inventory scales. When I put the first form of the VPI together in 1953, I searched through the interest literature looking for the main dimensions of vocational interests. The first six a priori scales of the VPI were the result. Then, when I was developing a theory of vocational choice in 1958, I needed an occupational classification scheme. I decided to use the first six scales of the VPI, because they already formed a simple but incomplete classification scheme, and because I didn't need to get anyones permission.

As we worked with the theory of vocational choice, it became apparent that we needed a more comprehensive classification to test the theory and to organize occupational data for practical applications. In 1966, we decided to extend the comprehensiveness of the classification by using VPI profiles

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to establish the place of various occupations in the classification. For instance, to categorize counselors, test a group of counselors and calculate their average VPI profile. Let their highest average scale score indicate which one of the six groups they belong to and let the second and third highest scales indicate their subgroup. This procedure for categorizing occupations produced a classification that adhered closely to the principles of classification and one that looked sensible.

Several longitudinal studies (Holland & Lutz, 1968; Holland & Whitney, 1968; Holland, 1968) showed that the classification organized the occupational preferences of high school and college students so that the category of a student's first preference was highly related to the category of his next preference. (Nafziger will report similar studies using work histories.)

In 1969, we discovered that the relationships among the 6 main categories could be shown by using a geometric model, the hexagon. Subsequently, Cole & Hansen (1971), Crabtree (1971), Nafziger & Helms (1972), Edwards & Whitney (1972) have shown that the empirical data for occupational codes and interest scales support the hexagonal arrangement.

The hexagonal model is on the first page of your handout or keepsake. The main categories in the classification are arranged in clockwise order: R, I, A, S, E, C. Adjacent categories are most alike: for example, Social and Enterprising occupations. Occupations at intermediate distances are somewhat alike. Opposites on the hexagon are most unlike -- for example, Conventional and Artistic. In addition, subcategories are found by moving around the hexagon. For example, the Social occupations are arranged as follows: SE's come first, because E follows S as you move clockwise around the hexagon; SC's come next, then SR's. The Occupations Finder for The

Self-Directed Search summarizes the classification obtained by using the hexagonal model for organizing occupations.

In 1970, McCormack at Purdue and Campbell at Minnesota provided both objective and interest data for more than 800 occupations. Some empirical techniques were developed so that their data could be used to create VPI profiles. Consequently, the classification was extended to all the main occupations in the U. S. That particular study is also important for two other reasons: (1) the subjective interest dimensions were found to be strongly related to a variety of objective data about both people and situations associated with an occupation, and (2) the occupational codes for student aspirants closely resembled the codes for adults employed in the same occupation.

In 1972, Viernstein developed a simple mathematical technique for assigning a Holland code to every occupation in the DOT. The reference for her work is in your handout. Tables for moving from the DOT to the Holland classification or vice-versa are also contained in the Guide to the Self-Directed Career Program and the SDS Guide.

Current Status

To summarize, the classification has six main categories and 72 subcategories. Categories are arranged in terms of their psychological relatedness so the user can see how different occupations or occupational groups resemble one another.

The classification itself is contained in the Occupations Finder of the SDS, the SDS manual, and Viernstein's article. Unfortunately for you, but fortunately for me, the most complete account of the classification's

origin, development, and current status is in my new book, Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers.

Like most classifications, this one has some deficiencies. Categorizations tend to shift slightly depending upon the sample used to define an occupation's place in the classification. And the development of the classification proceded in a series of circuitous steps because it was not possible to finance the ideal procedure. However, all classificatory techniques were coordinated by the original VPI scales. In short, the present classification is the outcome of much empirical work but individual categorizations are approximate rather than precise.

The virtues of the classification appear to outweigh these shortcomings:

1. The classification is easily communicated to counselors, students, and adults.

2. The classification is well-validated. It has been successfully applied to the preferences, current jobs, or work histories of elementary, high school, college, and adult samples.

3. The classification can be interpreted by a theory of careers which has undergone more than 100 empirical tests.

4. The classification is versatile. It can be used to interpret and organize data about people or occupations. The classification is a tool for understanding a single person, a group of persons, or any occupational data that are clearly related to an occupational title.

5. The classification is easily revised or extended. Profiles for the VPI, the SDS, the Strong, or the Kuder can be used to create occupational codes for new occupations or cumulated to achieve more reliable codes for all occupations.

6. The classification is comprehensive. Any occupational title in the DOT can be assigned a three-letter code.